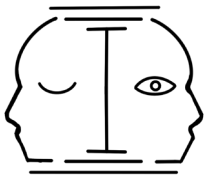
Impostor

Volume 3, Issue 1 Spring/Summer 2023

Impostor

A Poetry Journal

Volume 3, Issue 1 • Spring/Summer 2023



Impostor: A Poetry Journal
Volume 3, Issue 1 • Spring/Summer 2023
© 2023 Impostor: A Poetry Journal

Visit us at ImpostorLit.com

Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Editors
L.M. Camiolo
Coral O'Leary

Logo by Paulina Sucre

Rights revert to authors upon publication. All rights reserved.

ISSN 2769-4569

Cover: Heda Willem Claesz (b. 1594, Haarlem, Netherlands–d. Haarlem, Netherlands, 1680), *Still Life with Gilt Goblet*, detail, 1635. Oil on panel, 43 x 57 cm. Collection of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or fewer. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

From the Editors

Welcome to the spring/summer issue of *Impostor*!

This issue's cover art is a seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting, a genre loaded with symbolism that touches on themes of mortality and the passage of time. In this case, the painting prominently features elaborate goblets—one broken, one upended, one half full—that may suggest various states of physical, moral, and emotional being; the randomness of fate and fortune; the results of decision-making; and the potential for destruction. The presence of the citrus fruit, with its rind halfway carved and hanging over the table, alludes to how short life truly is, whether for people or produce.

The thirty-nine poems herein also engage these themes: personal and political histories are recalled and mined for meaning; nostalgia uncovers a visceral yearning to recover things lost in memory; and acts of artistic creation invigorate and flourish in the present moment. These events take place against the backdrop of human mortality and all its facets—a universal experience that ebbs and flows, begins and ends.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Warmly,
L.M. and Coral

Our Mission

Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself—we certainly have! The literary world is rife with lofty and exclusionary definitions of what qualifies the title of "poet." When we decided to create this journal, we knew that first and foremost, we wanted to create a welcoming and encouraging space for writers who may feel intimidated by the established literary world or who feel as if their credentials—or lack thereof—don't fall in line with what's expected. We want your submissions regardless of your history; age, academic background, or the length of your curriculum vitae hold no influence on our view of what constitutes a poet. Your voice matters—we want to hear it!

Table of Contents

Michelle Ott
Where I Find You 10

Amanda McArdle-Duale
Twenty-Something Slices 11

Easton Lane
I open 12

Nicole Thackwray
Plastic Stars 13

R. Nikolas Macioci
The Interior of Disbelief 14

Ace Boggess
Elegy for an Enemy 15

Miles Varana
After Group 16

Jake Wrentmore
Riparian 17

Michael O'Connor
Limited Time Only 19

Mark D. Bennion
Breezeway 21

Zachary Forrest y Salazar
A Father's Day, Antigua, Guatemala 23

Doug Fritock
Ritual 24

Mark Thomas
Friday 25

Renee Williams
I'm From 26

C.D. Girard
A Spring Mourning 27

Alex Rieser
Alluvial Deposition 29

Aiyana Masla
This Practice 30

Glenis Ann Moore
Infants 31

Kathi Crawford
Golden Bars 32

Lee Gill
Let's Catch Up 33

Jay Thomas
On Eating the Young 34

Anna Molenaar
Obituary to the Four Lobsters Sent to My Father as a Thank You 35

Jonathan Harris
Linguistician 36

Koah Baer
Night Choir 37

Anna Boughtwood
Two Women, in the Woods 38

Ryan Stephen Thornton
Candy Floss Queer 39

Natasha Wolkwitz
The Lambs Were Born Screaming 41

E.E. Murray
Putting on a Confining Dress 42

Sayantani Roy
Limbo 44

Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb
The Florida Scrub-Jay and Other Evil Birds 45

Will Diggs
Jordan Peele Did It 47

Howie Good
Holy, Holey, Wholly 49

Neal Allen Shipley
Bullet Journal 50

Jonathan Chibuike Ukah
A Hole in the Wall 51

Ben Schroeder
Brim 53

Kennedy Garza Brown
I'd Give You the Sun if You Asked Me 55

Venya Gushchin
all we can assert 56

Arukoya Tamois
in the wake of the quiet one 57

Marc Brimble
Small Pills 58

Where I Find You

Michelle Ott

The armpit holes
of my duck shirt.
Ceramic sharks
with streaky paint,
white opal
set in tarnishing
silver. Bowls of pasta,
dripping butter.
Sappho's margins,
the breadth
of ruined blankness.
Red poppies, blue foxes,
yellow skies
in hazy Junes.
Pastel index cards
asking questions
of silent gods.
Heat lightning, thunder-
rattled windows.
Doorframes
and unlit closets.
Nowhere. Everywhere.
The silence, the sound
of tomorrow
and tomorrow
and tomorrow.
(I find you)
in nothing.
In everything.

Twenty-Something Slices

Amanda McArdle-Duale

I peel the orange slice—its stickiness like bubblegum
you wanted rid of, losing lip-puckering sour-sweet over time.
The tree it sprung from was once shorter than me: a decomposing photograph
proving what memory can't. I reach into a mushy core and think
I will never again be this ripe.

One day, I was rosemary who hid from the sun, who spat out water
like a baby's first taste of vegetable, before I became her who offers you
a formal slice of apple pie—the lattice top design my mom made
when her presence was welcoming like a coir doormat on bare feet.
That door is slammed.

I was meant to put things together, not watch them disintegrate,
fade,
or rot.

He taught me to measure the oak, position a saw without terror
of being sliced, but autumn wind carried sawdust into its impersonal air,
and my hands tremble when I'm inches, yards,
miles from fear. I miss imperfect artworks
my father placed on burn piles.

This puny organ is a museum of slices—see the summers of Bermuda
grass stains and hand-picked citrus by the countryside,
the Gulf of Mexico hurricane I ordained. See the debris of dreams
I threw up in my childhood sink. The colorless concrete I stained
once my wholesomeness was an egg cracked in half, bleeding yolk.
See the two-sided battles fought on the peninsula of my mind—
where I waved a white flag from across a lava ocean.
Villains of past eras haunt me

with familiar knives, and adult her hides like an apprehensive kid
waiting to be sought. I find
a towel to wipe gushing juice and throw away the peels.
Do you want the first slice?

I open

Easton Lane

my overstuffed gut of memories. Watch my-
self purchase iced coffee for the first time, hear my
caffeinated thought-streams. Put the final piece on
my Millenium Falcon, place Lego people
together at its Dejarik table. Take my
first bite of ice cream at age seven, long after
the other sweet-tooth kids had whisked their plastic spoons
into the sea. Action figures posed, immortal—

but I get a call from my best friend. Let me close up
my stomach. I hope she's still happy there. *We'll resume*
shortly. She says finding love in college is hard. No
shit, I say, clutching my own hand. We talk for a while,
inside mind catacombs, finding when we were almost
Homecoming Royalty, my stained glass obsession, the
time we each took one of the cadaver's lungs. We don't

talk about this, but while my mouth makes words, I remember
how I held the smaller lung; the solemn, wonderful eye
lock we made across the donor's open chest cavity—
I wonder what formaldehyde smells like from dead nostrils.
I lose her thread of thought, but I recover by changing
the topic to death. Our discussion dies, and I reopen

my gut to offer you what has accumulated. Under
polymerized skin we've already entered, my memory
window is still stained with poetry and the microplastics
of childhood joys. *Why are we venturing here again*, you ask.
Already I am remembering more moments, reliving
all the calls, opening my embalmed carcass to the readers

holding my lungs as my spirit blows beyond plastic lesions:
preserved, crystalline, my body of work—always in season.

Plastic Stars

Nicole Thackwray

We kiss at the airport

I stumble home
Turning to salt

You'll come back
After a fortnight
After a lifetime

I smile at the hopelessness-mouth
Beg it not to consume
My head
that cannot see the future
My heart
that cannot hold the past

How do I go on
I will never write again

I fall into my room
And look up at the plastic stars
Glow-in-the-dark and dusty now
Each the size of a thumbnail

You stuck them to the ceiling with me
Murmured the names of constellations we liked
Grouped the Pleiades
Hung the Southern Cross

Catasterist,
You tacked every plastic star to my drywall sky
Like spirit kisses
Like prayers

Left me to carry them,
Weeping Atlas
Praising the heavens for their weight

The Interior of Disbelief

R. Nikolas Macioci

Sometimes I feel frail as a parakeet
struggling to stay on Christ's perch.
I have become my own Holy Ghost,
proprietor of half a belief in God,
not ample enough to balance frustration
of curiosity against satisfaction that
cheerless religion promises.

In early years, I reached for truth, drank
a thousand beers from a ceramic mug.
There was no doubt in my purpose to
obliterate the trinity, to struggle free
of something less real than a Teflon pan
or the cutlery that hung in a neat row
on a wooden rack. I asked why
I couldn't touch hands with God, why
eating the wafer, drinking the wine
brought me just so close to apprehending
secrets only the holy had the honor
of understanding. When I stopped drinking,
I listened to concertos, appreciated
ethereal lift away from the abyss
of questions that ate at me like a rampant
tumor. The music cradled my disbelief,
turned off useless inquiry, humbled me
with common sense.

Since then, I've pulled away from piety
of churches, made a habit of feeding bread
crumbs to birds, watching them scatter
into the sky without redemption
or a promise of heaven.

Elegy for an Enemy

Ace Boggess

There have been so few
for me; for you,
enough I like to think
you don't remember
why we fought
(I carry your scar
as swelling on my knee
like a boxer's cauliflower ear).

Picture you with dirt-
brown hair, long & curling
like a bobbed wig;
hands waving pristine
copies of Burroughs &
Crowley; eyes glaring
at everyone as through
crudely-painted glass.

When I learned you died,
the manner of your death,
a residue of powder
on your hand, I got it:
I was a wisp of a threat;
you the enemy of you,
your life a war
resolving with a loss.

After Group

Miles Varana

Vets drink without reverence,
get sober without memory.
They hush in the late afternoon,
bothered by a stillness.

Riparian

Jake Wrentmore

Sometimes I wish I could die
but not be dead—
to end what once was started. Not by me

but by the hands
of our mothers and fathers. I can't say
I want to stop living
but I can't
keep living like this. Between

the hemlock trees
and upon the pinecones
buried in the peat moss—
gone to generations
past. Breath now held

hostage by private property farms
and real estate tycoons. Land
now a fugitive, vying
for a scrap of respect—
freedom from concrete jungle swing sets
and long-lost American Dreams.

I wonder if the trees feel
like I do.
Like air—
slowly squeezed out of them
not unlike a leaky tire— driven

far beyond its expiration date. I wonder
if the trees yearn
for the —*freedom to roam*—

to spread their roots, far,
wide, intertwined—
groping towards the waterways
and under the mushroom troops
through the aging riparian zones—

slipping on bricks,
built on the peat. Muck
boots, mush-soup, earth
oozing up and through. Foundations
cracked and walkways askew—

slip hazard, trip hazard, ice sheet
accident— another near-death disaster. Buildings
built on sinking soil.

Limited Time Only

Michael O'Connor

Another rush passes over.
Alerts, open tabs, and memories overwhelm,
Crowding the entry points of a mind
Like bristling commuters
Jostling for space
In a subway car.

Messenger bags and backpacks
Carrying laptops and old masks
Brush against a woman
Swiping through filters that show her
With strong cheekbones,
In black and white,
And with dog ears.

Evening drive-thru lines
Snaking through parking lots,
Jutting out into traffic,
Will frustrate journeys home.
Their paths lit by glowing signs
For soft tacos and nacho fries available
For a limited time only.

The impulse to shrink away cuts
Across these obstacles.
The inviting horizon that lies
At the end of curling
Inward beckons.

Every flight is a departure
That returns its passengers
To the gates where they boarded,
The runways where they took off,

The security they passed through.
Every passenger a contradiction
The cabin crew cannot resolve.

Breezeway

Mark D. Bennion

Some days I stood there waiting,
watching rain pelt the ground
or snow drift like poplar seeds.

And sometimes I'd linger
between the annex
and the classrooms
teeming with students, recalling
their compliments and questions,
wondering when you'd come
to pick me up.

The wind tunneled through me
when a colleague opened the door.
My mind yearned for the verve
of pre-dinner conversation
and the ritual of reading to each other.
The bedtime stories tucked
me in, especially when you told them.

Before long, each child entered
the hallway of your belly
connecting the threads of desire
and possibility, sometimes coming
between the hungers of the heart.

Your voice, then as now,
pleasing as powdered sugar,
candid as salt. Both flavors
landing nightly on my lips.
I can still taste the contrasts

when I find any arch

linking two places,
or when I wait for your words
and our children's laughter
singing like an April rain
after a long winter.

A Father's Day, Antigua, Guatemala

Zachary Forrest y Salazar

Bombas are fireworks that sound like mortar shells,
while chicken buses rattle (I can hear them)

against jagged cobblestones. Pueblo church bells
and *tuk-tuk* misfired combustions, pretend

these street sounds don't curl me into myself.
The lizards in the rafters chirp often

into the night, just to make sure they tell
me what volcanos and I have in common.

Constant pain we try and save for ourselves,
steam and black smoke, caged anger a mountain

towering above Antigua. Rain falls in swells
and traffic quakes—I think about you—back when

I was young and you preached God's "miracles."
I wanted a father who loved his children.

Ritual

Doug Fritock

It's a ritual I remember clearly, my grandfather
retrieving a cigar from its fancy cardboard box,

untwisting the cellophane wrapper, and slipping off
the foil band like a ring from a finger, then lighting it

with the old zippo lighter he kept tucked in his pocket.
Often, after puffing on one while reading the *Intelligencer*

or watching Charles Kuralt on the telly, he would set down
the extinguished stub in some unexpected place, like the sill

of a window or the shelf of a bookcase. I suppose he thought
he'd come back later, but never remembered. After a while,

my grandmother would go around the house collecting them,
like a valkyrie collecting fallen soldiers, then add them

to the apple skins and potato peelings in her compost bin.
"Shhh," she would whisper, lifting her finger to her lips,

"they're not dead, they're only sleeping."

Friday

Mark Thomas

Cancer ripped me
like a skunk attacks a garbage bag.

Outwardly,
just a small hole
in the bottom left-hand corner
of the sack.
But inside, the contents
somehow
completely scrambled.

What trails from the tiny wound
looks cosmically random,
not like bits of me:

waxy paper and twisted rags,
crumpled love letters
and takeout menus,
scraps of electrical wire
and colored yarn,
empty vitamin bottles
and coffee grounds;

mysterious innards
pulled across the lawn,
to the wonder and amazement
of the neighbourhood.

They shake their heads
and marvel.
“So much damage,” someone says,
“from such a small snout.”

I'm From

Renee Williams

I'm from green eyes and grease
from the hills of Nelsonville and the pits of Bone Hollow.
I'm from Halloween of witchery, goblins, and ghosts.
I'm from days spent milling around an old automotive garage
squawking with the old-timers.
I'm from finding the perfect green eye shadow to match eyes that
are sometimes emerald, sometimes aquamarine.
I'm from mud-running on the dirt bike with my father in Snake Hollow
and walking home because we ran out of gas.
I'm from trips to Big Bear with Mom and trying to find any product
that would tame those ragamuffin curls.
I'm from watching the Hocking River rise and wondering about
the secrets she carries with her.
I'm from the land of the largest illuminated cross
to the boom of it crashing when it fell over.
I'm from listening to my cousin play the harmonica on the back porch
and hanging out with his biker gang when they all came to visit.
I'm from the grandmother who made the most perfect fudge that I could never replicate
and the most delightful beer bread ever.
I'm from that very same woman who is said to have a beer every day
and she lived a good, long life.
I'm from stories of Bigfoot, and I have sympathy for him, chased down like a rock star.
I'm from the woods of Appalachia, from salamanders and sticks,
scarecrows and snot.
I'm from buckeye trees, Friday night lights, football championships, and corn dogs.
I'm from the fountain on the Square, the Mine Tavern, and Stuart's Opera House.
I'm from a place that no one wants to be from, yet so many want to see.

A Spring Mourning

C.D. Girard

We wake to birds
serenading the coming thaw
halted
by threads of winter.

Cotton balls resting
In the morning sun,
an explosion
of bulrushes on trees
left there by the Moon
as a gift to her brother.

As the day rises,
we remember:
winter cockleburs
sticking to
woolly hats and mittens.

To childhood wind through hair
on toboggans,
down hills,
through mountains,
and forests.

Gasoline perfumes
clinging to clothing as the
engine reverberates,
bouncing, absorbed
by surrounding branches and crust,
on trails made sleek by
groomers.

We drink hot chocolate
to melt frost-bitten cheeks
and snowman feet
and transport ourselves to other worlds
in a different type of forest
wrapped tightly in words
by the light of the fire.

The sun radiates a
peaceful calm,
nostalgic
emotions tied to cold,
to crunch,
to crumble,
between feet and fingers
to be melted away
by the Moon's
brother.

Alluvial Deposition

Alex Rieser

The makers advance and retreat — a lean old horse that has been a good horse ; behind the grazing lands a little hut falls down ... the archeological team found a sixty-five year old coke cap that is technically the relic of a past civilization , and the land must be marked for preservation . Those with strong hind legs that can still gallop through the pod-bearing plants — the strong grow luxurious in their assured courage ; defects don't hinder them as the abysmal lakes edges dry ... tomorrow , debts . The communion takes place among those who command the lowest thrones — the basement apartment thrones the graveyard shift thrones the ridesharing commuter thrones ; last water strider of the season made lunch for a ruby-throated hummingbird ... songs that don't look back twice , no one becomes a mountain .

This Practice

Aiyana Masla

These mornings
cobalt cave gleamed, spring cream lavendered,
wild mustard, chartreuse.
        Long, the return from night
scarlet reddened, opera rose,
extended, magentaed ritual. Turquoise fool's
devoted gold, peach candy, opening
hands
slow as whispers, robins egg. Brushes, this unhurried bleed,
the lamp's warm circle & room-warm tap water. Canyon spreading,
staining sleeves—wetted paper singing
an amaranthine smear where flyaways were tucked, ear
now charcoal mouthed. Splattered; the tv tray used as an easel,
the rim of the flower vase used for washing
        happy-marking the sheets of the bed
splashed & supple. Thickened with pigment,
tinted, these tender minutes, formed, pulsing, possible.
Wrists opaque, fingers saffron mystic ox, flax
swallowed in permanent green light.
Worry enveloped in ochre umber
        submerged mars
                burnt orange, manganese night siren
soaking through ancestor's dusk,
                purple ivory covered, wet coil black.
Listening,
        as patient, vivid
as animate as soil.

Infants

Glenis Ann Moore

Prefab classrooms, so cold in winter.
The coal-fired boilers we huddled round
burnt our legs and froze our hands.
Sleeping in camp beds after lunch:
an outward-bound idea inside the hall,
where I played triangle in the band.
The smell of cabbage; free milk at break.
Denise stole mine, I did not complain.
Spelling so bad they made me stand
in front of the class like the dunce
they made me think I was. Crying
to go home, getting tanned
by the headmistress for spoiling
the Nativity play when I fell
off the table: an angel in
a strange land.

Golden Bars

Kathi Crawford

Preheat the oven—line a baking dish with pre-cut parchment paper. It's the easiest to use. If you don't know how to bake, no need to worry, lovely one. This recipe is easy. Just follow the instructions. Pretend I am your grandmother who knows the secret to a simple life. When I was a girl, I used my Easy Bake Oven to make cookies for my brothers. I learned how to be sweet and welcomed into a brood of men.

So, you'll need a mixing bowl and a large, wooden spoon. Beat the liquids together first then fold in the dry. This is a trick of the best bakers. There are things most men will never know. To make cookie bars, one way is the only way, but not in life. You can learn how to bake. You are from a long line of hardy women.

Pour the mixture into the dish. Smell the sugar as the bars turn golden. Pull the dish out of the oven at just the right moment. Set aside to cool. Don't touch the hot edges with your hands. Don't say yes to marrying someone you know is not the one. Hightail it out of there if it doesn't feel right. When the lies keep coming, it's time to go.

Pull out a fresh plate. Fill a glass of milk. You know what love is. This is just another way to learn how to survive.

Let's Catch Up

Lee Gill

Manhood was sold to us *assembly required*
with a faded manual missing pages.

When our eyes connect, we wordlessly
share wounds that hastily scab
over
with cool shop talk.

I ask, "How are you?"
You say, "Good. And you?"

Our fine friendship spans years.
We still forget each other's birthdays.

Internally, we hemorrhage in sync.
Another page of the manual wilts away.

On Eating the Young

Jay Thomas

When I was young and home sick, *Animal Planet*
showed videos of dying young animals.

Left to my own devices and glued to the couch with fever,
I found myself softly cheering for the poor prey animals.

It was more than an underdog story; to me, it was impossible,
but a story nonetheless. I would never feel like those animals.

When I went vegetarian for six months in college,
it was to try something new—life without dead animals.

I was still vegetarian at New Year's, a resolution,
I was sure—no more would I eat animals.

But the eyes of a lion made me as the ball dropped.
I abandoned my resolution. To save myself, I ate the animals.

Obituary to the Four Lobsters Sent to My Father as a Thank You

Anna Molenaar

GOD BLESS,
YOU FOUR ORGIED IN A STYROFOAM BOX.
RUBBER BANDS ON CLAWS
BEGGING TO PINCH
GROWING COLD.

IT TOOK THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS TO
DRAG YOU FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR
WHERE YOU
PINCHED THE HELL OUT OF EVERYTHING
TO THE CUTTING BOARD
IN THE BACKYARD.

I MADE THEM KILL YOU FIRST,
BEFORE YOU GOT THE POT.

(I didn't eat you but I didn't save you so I'm complicit as well I'm afraid)

AND WHEN THEY CUT INTO YOUR BRAINS
THIN SEAWATER SPILLED OUT ONTO THE
CONCRETE.
I LOOKED AT IT AND SAW THE REFLECTION OF
MEMORIES FROM THE OCEAN, OF LIVING ON THE
DARK SANDY FLOOR AND
PINCHING THE HELL OUT OF EVERYTHING.

GOODSPEED,
YOU FOUR.
MAY THERE BE FLESH ENOUGH
FOR ENDLESS PINCHES
IN CRUSTACEAN HEAVEN.

Linguistician

Jonathan Harris

On the first day of Linguistics class,
I bet they ask you what you call someone
who studies linguistics.

Isn't that what we're here for?

"How did the strawberry meet his wife?"
"She saw him in his cool whip."

His wife the blueberry.

They go together like dark spruce treetops
and Northern Lights on brisk polar nights,

and just a single chocolate drizzle apart,
between ice crystals lit by the open freezer.

If I had the chance, I'd ask if they know,
how to be like tulips after April snow.

Night Choir

Koah Baer

You've heard it said that to be queer in this country
is to be a nocturne played on the precipice of morning.
You're up all night, listening. God playing the gunshots
or the fireworks, your choice. So many choices, for you, for me
America is about choices. You get to make one or two of them.
The boy in the passenger side. The absence of boy. The absence
of the passenger side. Your dad's diesel split in half now, like a tangerine,
the two halves racing in opposite directions. Look, and it's you.
Look at the sky and it's fireworks. Look at yourself and it's bullets. Look at the moon and
no more moon. The record skips, the white disc suddenly thrown off the platter
then shattering at your feet: an explosion of light. Quick, sing something.
The sun is shining.

Two Women, in the Woods

Anna Boughtwood

The only puzzled looks
we elicit in the woods
are those from
wildlife.
I find their harmless curiosity
much easier to bear
than the well-intentioned
curiosity of strangers.
The only whispers
we hear are
the leaves trembling
amid the trees
which I much prefer
to murmured
speculation of strangers.
Here,
our love is neither illicit nor remarkable.

Candy Floss Queer

Ryan Stephen Thornton

For C.33 (Oscar Wilde)

I stood calmly in your cell awaiting a divine message,
an epigram of my own, whispered across an age,
maybe my hair looked nice, you never said,
I closed my eyes and waited, I looked out of your window,
no, I didn't, it was too high, so I settled with looking
at the same sky through the same bars for a bit,
that'll do for now, won't it?

I stood quietly by your grave awaiting reassurance,
a curled & wicked warmth gripping my shoulder in affirmation,
I dressed up for the occasion, and I wrote, leaning
on your perspex tomb's tomb,
just another boy in a graveyard with a stranger's lipstick on his collar,
I wrote a play somewhat adjacent to one of yours, you would've hated it,
I wouldn't have turned back the clock to see you there,
but I would've gone as far back as being able to feel the cold
embrace of the stone that hides you, protects you, protects us now.

I've been to one of the streets where you lived, I sat
where I knew you'd sat on the grass, my arse indent
significantly larger than yours I'm sure,
I couldn't see in through the windows, so I closed my eyes
and pictured purple, gold, brocade, I've got curtains like that,
I pictured a slew of young men draped in loose fabric,
barely covered,
you can't be coquettish when all you're wearing is a filigree.
Maybe it wasn't entirely your slew.

I finally found your prison door in a queer museum,
and all I wanted to do in that moment was to slowly adjust
my stance, lean forward, wait until the staff member looked away, and
lick it.
The door. Cold against my tongue, smoother than I had anticipated.

I wore velvet that day, and your collected works were on sale everywhere,
they were unspeakably beautiful, they would've barely stood out among my other seven.
The door didn't taste of anything.
I'm not sure what I was expecting.

I live so much in awe of you,
I might not have been surprised if it had tasted of candy floss.
Though it was probably someone behind me
vaping sweet-nothings in the Queer Museum.

Maybe you were more surprising in life than in death,
the orchestration of your bijou legacy has been dreadfully handled,
and I can't be doing it any favours now.
It is what it is, as you were what you were, and—I...

The Lambs Were Born Screaming

Natasha Wolkwitz

There is no horror like being born
standing. I revere the drama
of the unable newborn. Genius
action of helplessness. Eyes too soft
to see and fingernails that could
peel right off if you tried, I assume. I admire
the ambiguous style, and the search
for the absence. I curl to kiss
my own knees, soften my jaw
for sustenance, and it does not come.

Putting on a Confining Dress

E.E. Murray

I

The sibilance of shifting smiles
on the face on the head on
the body unfragmented fair
unburdened beauty and the
soft of her skin what
makes her a moon
or angel or ocean
or other continuous things
my beauty like could be
unending, though I draw
it through my body
like water through stones

II

Oh to change stone
cast down granite
replace my breast with marble, assuaged
assured, no one
could tell me apart
from earth-born,
I, made by alchemy,
beautiful, though water
flows easier through granite

III

This is my body.
And it's what I've got
good at. To aim for
another I might miss

that fear I could end
less beautiful less me
no matter how happy I could be

IV

I can’t take the
lust of my bones
my love shifts inside
of me, never leaving
longing to make her
beauty mine

V

One time, years ago,
I could have made myself another. No way of
knowing.

Limbo

Sayantani Roy

It's bad luck to eat during an eclipse, so I chewed the inside of my mouth. It's still raw. Waited for the moon to come out intact like a newly washed dish, but it never did. Coming down from the roof, I walked down the stairs of our old home. Remember how we were back then? Guileless like children. True, this house is only one-storied and has no flight of stairs. But hear me out, will you? I'd climbed up to the roof by placing one foot then another into the wall grooves. On bricks jutting out from unfinished business. Lazy bum, that contractor. Stalls work when he wants. Deferment after deferment. Will you talk to him? See this through? One needs a rooftop room. A small room to hide. Anyway, coming down, I took the stairs to nowhere and then climbed up again to that exact same place. Now I am forever coming down and going up as if in a fathomless Escher lithograph. Things are as dandy as ever.

The Florida Scrub-Jay and Other Evil Birds

Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb

His talk is that all jays
are socialist birds, this guy
who squawks too much
and has even more opinions
about the U.S. government,
both its domestic and foreign
policies; America is first
in his pecking order. He also
wishes eagles and hawks
would take advantage
of his hanging bird feeders.

I try to patiently explain
that raptors are carnivores,
but the man insists they
should take whatever he offers,
that premium birdseed and suet
are wasted on weaker species,
and that these jays in Arizona
are just as evil as the ones
in Florida, where he is from.

He migrated here in a flock
of Floridians tired of theme-park
tourists, wanting to be where
he could have a say to ensure
a wall or closed border, admits
this is a stronger ambition than
advocating to protect the status
of mockingbird as state bird
back home—I wish he were.

How can an endangered native

scrub-jay, so smart and social,
spark such political fire?
As if the mockingbird really
gives a damn; as if this stupid
man should have been allowed
to move here into my territory.

Jordan Peele Did It

Will Diggs

after "Dinosaurs in the Hood" by Danez Smith

The movie comes out this summer, a blockbuster season headliner.
They're going to call it exactly what you called it and of course
you already know this because you wrote the script. A John Singleton-inspired,
T. Rex-filled, and Viola Davis-starring masterpiece of a film. Here recently,
Black people been cash-stuffing the box office like nobody's business
so you know that when it was reported that Jordan Peele asked to direct,
well... the budget was of no concern.

It starts off with the little boy, playing with his toy stegosaurus on the bus.
His class on a field trip to a museum that he's already been to,
got the stegosaurus from the gift shop as shown in a flashback later. His
parents played by Nicole Beharie and Anthony Mackie, their chemistry
as seen in *Black Mirror* playing out perfectly again on screen.
They raise the little boy in a whole home right outside of DC. No room
for metaphors about how the boy is terrified in this world where he already
feels unlovable or abandoned or out-of-place.

Angela Bassett is Anthony's mom in the movie. Flipping coffee tables in front of
windows and burning down a silo filled with those hissing velociraptors
on her Bernadine shit. Mother Cicely is not here to make her two speeches
but you have her credited as an executive producer. There is a scene where a
cop car gets dropped into the ocean by a pterodactyl...
after it gets pooped on. In another, the town's bank, besieged by a bunch
of brontosauruses, is blown up. The screen is filled with bloody banknotes
falling to the pavement. And it is not a metaphor for how this country's
capitalists make their money off the backs of both the living and the dead.

No microaggressions found their way into this movie Danez. No speeches
from a non-Black, balding mayor about how much the
defense of this town means to everyone, not just the inner city. How
this is just another example of how the footprints of African-Americans
can be found in the footnotes of every chapter of US history. No lines
from gentrifying lips about the condition of the brownstones on the block.

No jokes about how we can always rely on Black women to save the day that were never funny to begin with. No tired and too many times told tales about the recognition being long overdue.

And the little Black boy never comes close to dying, not once. He loses a couple of toys along the way, but never people. Every single member of the top-billed cast fights their ass off to protect him and they all survive with their scars to the end. The little Black boy and his daddy and his mama and his grandma and the aunties and the neighbors. All of the Black people fight back. All of the Black people live to see another day. All of the Black people live. All of the Black people live.

Holy, Holey, Wholly

Howie Good

The twisted frame of a trolley car hit by a shell smolders in the middle of the road. Some are asking, “Who are we fighting?” Others are packing up in case the enemy comes this way. It feels to many like they’re already here. Illegals are enlisted to fill sandbags and roll bandages. My 97-year-old father seeks shelter in a shallow doorway from the debris raining down: ancient love letters and faded black-and-white snapshots and gratuitous shards of memory. He understood God to have promised to send help, but time has passed and help has yet to arrive.

&

A couple is arguing in the gravel parking lot of a soot-blackened heaven, drunkenly cursing each other like Rimbaud and Verlaine when they were mismatched lovers on leave from poetry. I press myself against the wall. The light God created is a vague haze, barely viable, somewhere on the spectrum between a shimmer and a shadow. I still can’t forget the screams of the animals trapped on the burning ark. Even ice on ponds is never 100 percent safe. It’s an unforgiving situation, Christ dying over and over on crucifixes above beds in children’s bedrooms all over the world.

&

A heart has been cut into slices with a cake knife and served on fancy dessert plates. How brilliant the blood is! Unfortunately, an angel in the guise of an itinerant peddler appears on the doorstep, flies encircling his head like a halo. He smiles, and his teeth are as black as the inside of the ovens at Auschwitz. History is stuck on repeat. We have all heard the stories of sacred promises exchanged, impossible tests of faith imposed, populous cities reduced with the wag of a divine finger to rubble. I’m still hiding after everyone else has gone home.

Bullet Journal

Neal Allen Shipley

after Dora Malech

Bosaw Gunn Head Shaver
Golding Maples Summers Hunter
Brazon Bates Bolden Snipes
Trimble Loving Turner Stern
Provost Vickers Council Church
Craven Said Parrish Young
White Black Brown Green
Coleman Shepard Taylor King
Johnson Rump Chapa Paugh
Weston Overstreet Waters Frost
Xtravaganza Milk Flores Clay
Guerrero Goodwin Justice Wright

Author's note: These are some surnames of queer people killed in the US through 2023, primarily by gun violence. The list of queer people, and the ways they are brutalized, is endless.

A Hole in the Wall

Jonathan Chibuike Ukah

In my father's narrative of survival, I found this hole in the wall.
Is it *Nigeria is*, or *Nigeria are*?
My sister emerged from the woods with a near-perfect body.
Do not ask me how she accomplished such a feat,
which my mother said was more than the miracle
she had always guessed God was willing to perform for her.
We were deep into the forest with wildflowers, climbing plants,
thorny branches, intestinal twigs, sticky seeds, and healing leaves,
not to mention the deadly cast of meandering grasses
searching for straying feet to curse with their smell.
The air stank of gunpowder, Ogbunigwe,
rotten leaves and dead wood coming alive like a fresh-faced phoenix
at our frightened, cramped footfall;
and, of course, the smoke and smell of hot dinner
swayed over our frightened noses. *Nigeria is*.

It was 1969. A year before no Victor, no Vanquished;
during the war of verbs or singular and plural,
when my father returned from a thousand-mile journey
with half of his heart sheathed like a blunt knife,
the other half prodding along with his brain
to make sense of the devastation of his grammar.
He wept over his broken calabash.
Must we say *Nigeria is*, or *Nigeria are*?
the blood dripping on his back from the streaks of whips
by brothers wearing hoods on the road, chanting singular verbs,
though they covered their incinerated faces with their balaclavas,
wielding Kalashnikovs on armoured bazookas.
Port Harcourt was the new Armenian soil
where bloated bodies lay like piled-up leaves, mounds of wet earth.
The pain was not the suffering he was going through,
but the agony that he could not rewrite the history of his verbs.

Our house was a room on high red sand,
beneath the web of lies that my aunt erected for my mother
in the valley of our village, a cave of trees and gods
who looked unperturbed as their sons murdered their returnees in hot blood
in the name of patriotism, fighting a war of grammatical purity.
My father resisted conscription in his land, citing honour
which he felt his country should have if not buried in the depth
of the tumult that fell on the day of the declaration.
My father said people died in the name of nothing,
their lips clutching the remnants of their love, their tenacity,
their hope that something would make meaning later
so that all those who died would live for something worthy,
a gaslighting of the moon into the sun on deserted roofs,
avoiding similar mistakes that killed a thousand soldiers.
Several times my father wrestled with the conscripts,
called them names before they left us alone. Their cluttered arms
and buckled boots stank of the dirty flesh of rodents and cockroaches,
which they picked up from their hideouts. Such duty followed them around
like flies following a corpse into the grave.
Now and then, I heard my parents drop names carelessly about
as though tossing pieces of paper on which they scribbled
the meaningless epitaphs of murdered friends and family
into places unavailable for memory. Such hatred smeared their lips,
like the leaves littering the ground with their rottenness.
I peel away my fear with eyes glued on my father's wrinkled face
as he moaned of lack of time for sympathy for the cause,
but every day mourned his loss, his sacrifice and sweat, lost in the war
declared in his name without giving him a name. *Nigeria are*.
We came out of the woods reeking of hot food gone cold,
our appetite slashed and gutted within our stomachs, our blood
chilled by the hope gathering on our brows like new dews.

Brim

Ben Schroeder

I sleep around
a body
pillow pressed
between
my dreaming thighs

I wake
surprised to find
I am not
astride
a horse

I am not
beside
my lover
beside
myself
but in myself
alone
a side
of the bed
empty
without
impression

my rustle
my reach
the sound
soft like
hands handling
clothes from the wash

the sun
on my face

the same sun
on the faces
of lovers
napping
together
on a couch

I'd Give You the Sun if You Asked Me

Kennedy Garza Brown

title borrowed from "J's Lullaby" by Delaney Bailey

despite it all I drove through Arkansas
more in love with you
than when we started this drive
2 am 2 days ago

we laughed at the irony
of why we were driving
and how much fun we were having

we knocked on the dashboard 3 times
in case the acknowledgment would attract the reality of our situation

no one expects an abortion to bring you closer to someone

but there we were, taking turns,
stretching over the gear shift and center console
just so that we could feel
the other's shirt on our cheek

all we can assert

Venya Gushchin

deny the analogy. the world is not
one. the sun is not a silver apple bobbing
along the waves in your tea. why do you reach
for a book when faced with a rock?

nothing rhymes.
autumn left no glasses on your nose.
even your love for fragments is two centuries
too late. the same two flies have circled
before your room was cut.
all we can assert is asymmetrical
identity:
you take off my clothes the way you
take off my clothes the way
you take them off

October 15, 2020

in the wake of the quiet one

Arukoya Tamois

let us squat upon these darkling plains
rolling asteroids like bones
black dogs surrounding us
                dark weather beating at our souls

Small Pills

Marc Brimble

Through moving bodies
I have no need to justify
why I slip between light
and the hours that slip
between my fingers
like the small pills
that fall into our throats
and lift our spirits
so high that our hands
are grabbing the stars
and make the smooth vibration
a warm arm
around my shoulder
nothing can ever question
the authenticity of this moment
even as it is lost
in a million other moments
that have gone before it
or the eyes of beautiful friends
I still yet have to meet
I never want to lose this feeling
as the rain
washes the sweat
off of my opened mind.

Contributors

Koah Baer is a poet from Florida. He is also a dancer. This is his first publication.

Mark D. Bennion and his wife, Kristine, are trying to parent two adult daughters, two teens, and one tween. They welcome your advice!

Ace Boggess is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy* (Brick Road, 2021). His writing has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Harvard Review*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble.

Anna Boughtwood lives just over the Dunn Memorial Bridge from Albany, New York. Her writing has appeared in *Sad Girls Club*, *BarBar Magazine*, *Dime Show Review*, and *Dipity*. She enjoys reading and working on elaborate knitting projects.

Marc Brimble lives in Spain and teaches people to speak English with a Bristolian accent, and how to make the perfect cup of tea.

Kathi Crawford is based in Houston, Texas, and hopes to create dialogue through her writing for the challenges of our time and as individuals. Her poetry has been featured in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Ephemeral Elegies*, *One Art*, and *The Write Launch*.

Will Diggs is a Black, queer pothos-loving poet residing in the Southeast United States. He'll be headed back to college in the fall to finish his undergraduate degree in writing and linguistics after a three-year break. His favorite song right now is called "Can't Breathe" by 9th Wonder and .SMITTY.

Zachary Forrest y Salazar is a software engineer, an amateur photographer, and getting back to his first love: poetry. He is working on emerging after spending twenty years in the tech industry. He is currently realizing a life-long dream and traveling around the world with his wife of seventeen years.

After spending many years in Rochester, Minnesota, **Doug Fritock** now lives with his family in Redondo Beach, California, but still dreams of snow. A tobacco chemist by training, he long ago gave up the dark arts and now sells vintage, swings kettlebells, tends native plants, and works on poems.

Kennedy Garza Brown is a New York-based poet and nonfiction writer published in *Grain of Salt Mag* and *Abditory Press*. Kennedy received their BFA in creative writing at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, and relentlessly pursues the expansion of their craft. Their work focuses on capturing the minute experiences that have rustled their soul.

Lee Gill is an activist and writer based in New Jersey. He brings light to issues regarding mental health, addiction/recovery, and the Black Experience in America.

C.D. Girard (she/her) is an Ottawa resident and Carleton University alumni, also in Ottawa. C.D. took an interest in writing as a way to question and make sense of the world's unknowns. When she's not writing, C.D. enjoys spending time photographing nature or working out. This is her first publication.

Howie Good's newest poetry collection, *Heart-Shaped Hole*, which also includes examples of his handmade collages, is available from Laughing Ronin Press.

Venya Gushchin is a poet, literary translator, and PhD candidate studying Russian poetry at Columbia University in New York City. His writings have appeared in *Cardinal Points*, *KinoKultura*, *Jacket2*, and elsewhere. Most recently, his translation of Yevsey Tseytlin's *Rereading Silence* was published by Bagriy & Company.

Jonathan Harris is a twenty-four-year-old PhD student living in Chicago. When not working on chemistry projects, he likes writing and sharing poetry on Instagram @_jjharris_.

Easton Lane is a poet, writer, blogger, and musician living in Littleton, Colorado, and Atlanta, Georgia. He currently attends Emory University in

Atlanta as a creative writing and environmental science double major. His poems can be found undergoing abiogenesis on Instagram @the_hydrothermal_vent.

R. Nikolas Macioci earned a PhD from The Ohio State University in Columbus. The Ohio Council of Teachers of English (OCTELA), named him the best secondary English teacher in the state of Ohio. He is the author of seventeen books. *Cafes of Childhood* was submitted for the Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

Aiyana Masla is the author of the chapbook *Stone Fruit* (Bottlecap Press, 2020). Her poems have appeared in *Cordella Press*, *West Trestle Review*, *Vagabond City Poetry*, *Rogue Agent Journal*, in print with *Impossible Task*, and elsewhere. Currently based in New York City, she is a queer interdisciplinary artist and anti-bias educator.

Amanda McArdle-Duale is a sapphic poet based in Southern California, and she studies English at the University of California, Irvine. Her poetry hinges on imagery and seeks to explore the internal juxtaposed by the external. Nature is her lifelong muse.

Anna Molenaar is a writer of poetry and prose concerned with nature, humanity, and the messes that occur when the two blend. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she received her MFA from Hamline University. She works as a preschool teacher.

Glenis Ann Moore has been writing poetry since the first Covid lockdown and does her writing at night as she suffers from severe insomnia. When she is not writing poetry she makes beaded jewelry, reads, and sometimes runs 10K races slowly. She lives just outside Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

E.E. Murray is a trans writer from New York. Her fiction revolves around memory, redemption, and youth. You can find her on Twitter @ee_murray_ and sparingly on her website at www.eemurray.com.

Michael O'Connor lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

Michelle Ott is an MFA candidate at American University in Washington, D.C., set to receive her degree in creative writing in 2023. Her work has previously appeared in *Black Fox Literary Journal*, and was featured in the 2022 D.C. Pride Poem-a-Day project. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Alex Rieser is is a poet and audiologist who holds an MFA from the University of San Francisco. More on Twitter @AlexRieser.

Sayantani Roy's writing straddles India and the United States, and she calls both places home. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Cold Lake Anthology*, *Gone Lawn*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *The Hooghly Review*, *The Seattle Times*, and *Wordgathering*. Find her on Instagram @sayan_tani_r.

Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb is author of the chapbook, *Shapes That Stay* (Kelsay Books, 2021). Her poetry has appeared in *Slipstream*, *Earth's Daughters*, *AJN: The American Journal of Nursing*, *Rise Up Review*, and elsewhere, with work forthcoming in the *New York Quarterly*. She is co-founder of the nonprofit Native West Press.

Ben Schroeder is a poet from Wisconsin, currently living in Madrid, Spain, and working as an English teacher. His poems have appeared in *Bluepepper*, *Dark Onus Lit*, and *& Change* and are forthcoming from *DMQ Review* and *One Hand Clapping*. He can be found on Twitter @bschroederpoet or his website at www.benspoems.com.

Neal Allen Shipley (he/him) is a behavior analyst currently living in Colorado. He is a plant collector and enjoys people, places, and things.

Arukoya Tamois is a nineteen-year-old South Korean poet and short story author. She considers herself to be a writer of magical realism.

Nicole Thackwray is a South African artist pursuing her postgrad while teaching young creatives. She is a National Poetry Prize recipient, and her work is widely featured in her home country. She lives with her dog and a perpetually overflowing library. When not writing, she makes films and dreams up art installations.

Mark Thomas is a retired English and philosophy teacher and ex-member of Canada's national rowing team.

Jay Thomas is a poet currently based in New Jersey. He has been writing since childhood but recently got serious about it. In his free time, he keeps tabs on the squirrels and sometimes writes a blog. This is his first publication.

Ryan Stephen Thornton is a working class, bisexual poet, writer, and performance maker from York, United Kingdom.

Jonathan Chibuike Ukah is a graduate of English and law living in the United Kingdom with his family. His poems have appeared and will soon appear in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Pierian*, *Boomer Literary Magazine*, *New Note Poetry*, *Wildfire Words Literary Magazine*, *Ariel Chart*, and elsewhere.

Miles Varana's work has appeared in *Typehouse*, *The Penn Review*, and *Passages North*. He has worked previously as a staff reader and managing editor at *Hawai'i Pacific Review*.

Renee Williams has written for Alien Buddha Press and *The New Verse News*, among others. Her photography can be seen in the Corolla Wild Horse Fund calendar, *Moss Piglet*, and the *New Feathers Anthology*.

Natasha Wolkwitz is a New Jersey-based queer writer and performance artist. She works with themes of intimacy, ritual, and the macabre. She graduated from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and continues to write professionally.

Jake Wrentmore (he/him) is a queer poet living in the Pacific Northwest with his partner and their two cats, Marty and Beatrix Bunny. When not writing, he enjoys cooking, watching *Star Trek*, and going to the lake to rent out kayaks and canoes.

Editors

L.M. Camiolo (she/her) is a writer and editor originally from New York and currently based in Philadelphia. She is a former poetry editor for *Toho Journal*, and her work has appeared in *Troublemaker Firestarter*, *The Minison Zine*, *A Coup of Owls*, *The Daily Drunk*, *Bullshit Lit*, and elsewhere. She is the founder of *Dark Entries*, a journal for dark poetry and flash fiction. You can find more at https://linktr.ee/lmcamiolo.

Hailing from rural Western New York, **Coral O'Leary** (she/her) is a lake-effect snow ex-pat, current New Yorker, queer poet, cultural worker, and asexual aromantic-spectrum lesbian. Her work has appeared in *Baby Teeth Journal*, *SORTES*, *Lavender Review*, *Lesbians Are Miracles*, and elsewhere. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2020 and Best of the Net in 2023. Coral can be found on Instagram @ohcoralpoetry or at www.coraloleary.com.

© 2023 Impostor: A Poetry Journal
ImpostorLit.com

ISSN 2769-4569